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ABSTRACT

This paper stresses the importance of inculcating students with intellectual and moral values so that they will become men and women "whose heads are not empty and whose chests are not hollow." Central characteristics of students who have internalized the values of ethics and critical thinking are that they take living seriously, bring thoughtfully reasoned conviction to the conduct of personal and professional affairs, seek to serve ideals beyond their own personal gratification, and strive constantly to improve themselves. Educators can incorporate ethics and critical thinking into the curriculum in a variety of ways, including focusing attention on the purposes and method of argument (i.e., stressing that argument is a method of discourse in which claims are supported by evidence): showing students how to do deductive demonstration and confirmation and falsification of hypotheses: introducing students to logic: involving students in writing assignments stressing reason: cautioning students against simplistic dogmatism (the assertion that nothing needs to be thought about because everything is already known): pointing out the pitfalls of absolute relativism (the belief that nothing is genuinely right or wrong): and exposing students to lessons in which ethics and critical thinking as well as their opposites are in practice. Among the numerous literary works suggested as good examples of positive or negative thought and/or action are "Faithful Ruslan," by Georgii Vladimov: "A Man for All Seasons," by Thomas Moore: and "The Apology," by Socrates. (DB)

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ETHICS AND CRITICAL THINKING THROUGHOUT THE CURRICULUM.

Edwin J. Delattre

Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the National Association of Independent Schools (Boston, Massachusetts, February 27, 1981).

CS 013 460

Ethics and Critical Thinking Throughout the Curriculum

The first things to understand about ethics and critical thinking in a curriculum are these:

(1) No one can have a moral problem or a serious question about what is right or wrong who does not care about what is right or wrong, who does not care about morality.

(2) No one can be persuaded by reason to be reasonable.

For these reasons, people must be brought into, initiated into, the community of reasonable people who take seriously the forms of conduct and thought which are morally and intellectually worthy of them. The central characteristic of the members of this community of reasonable people of good will is precisely that they do not treat living a life cavalierly; they take it seriously -- not humorlessly, but seriously. And they are concerned to enable the members of successive generations of human beings to join this community.

They are committed to the education and training of people whose heads are not empty and whose chests are not hollow. To people, that is, who bring thoughtfully reasoned and passionate conviction to the conduct of their personal and professional affairs. Such people are capable in practice of clear-headed, knowledgeable, and decisive deliberation and action which serve ideals beyond their own personal gratification and pleasure and beyond their own self-interest. When people overcome the empty-headedness with which all of us enter the world, the ignorance in which all of us being, they become worthy to lead by virtue of their wisdom, knowledge, and judgment, and their justice. And when they achieve the excellence of character -- the courage and the temperance -- which fills the human chest, their combined virtues enable them to stand more faithfully than others for principles in the face of hardship,

temptation, and danger, principles which can be justified by reason and to which faithfulness and loyalty are therefore appropriate and even necessary up to the limits of human endurance.

I have been asked to speak today to the educational means by which such boys and girls, men and women, can be most effectively generated. In the course of my text, I will describe such means, and I will speak further to the characteristics of men and women whose heads are not empty and whose chests are not hollow.

The first and most fundamental feature of education worthy of the name is that it promotes in the young aspiration -- the desire to become more and better than one is. The encouragement of aspiration depends above all on what may be called intellectual and moral propagation.

Propagation consists of example, explanation, description, narrative, responses to questions, drama -- that is, of the forms of communication available among people, adults and children. It consists in mature people giving of themselves to the young and welcoming the young to participate in the business of being families and schools, on teams, in youth groups, churches, synagogues, in civilized institutions.

Now in teaching the art of critical thinking, there are skills and attitudes to be imparted. The attitude which matters above all others turns on recognition that argument does not, in the discipline of logic, mean disagreement or quarrel but rather is a unit of discourse in which claims are supported by evidence; it consists of the giving of reasons as a way of determining what is probably, what is true, and what does not merit belief. This meaning of argument is intended to make clear that arguments are not competitive; they are not like a game in which one can seek victory; they are not to be won or lost. Rather they are cooperative ventures in discovery, discovery of what conclusions, what positions, have the prevailing evidence in their favor. Arguments are not put-downs, except when they are misunderstood or ill-used, and children who are taught oherwise, taught that the purposes of argument are merely

to persuade or merely to put someone down, will be driven from reason instead of being drawn to it.

With respect to skills, mathematics and the sciences, showing how to do deductive demonstration and confirmation and falsification of hypotheses, is a straightforward means of exhibiting rigor in practice. But the other disciplines must be used as well. Teachers should study a decent logic text or two; Irving Copi's Introduction to Logic or Stephen Barker's Elements of Logic will do, especially the portions dealing with informal logic, the reasoning of non-technical discourse and deliberation. This study will show how the criteria of relevance, consistency, and logical sufficiency apply to arguments and accordingly how to tell reliable reasoning from reasoning which is flawed and untrustworthy. It also enables teachers to be very precise in dialogue with students. Students should be exposed in all the disciplines to good arguments and not just to bad ones; if they are not, they will tend to conclude that the only purpose of critical thinking is to find the faults in reasoning and not to search for the power and force of arguments. In a recent history class which I taught at Metairie Park Country Day School outside New Orleans, for example, the students had been studying Social Darwinism; we outlined together the theory of The Origin of Species, a theory which argues that the fittest survive. We then laid out the theory of Social Darwinism, which argues that the fittest individuals survive, the fittest members of species. But that classes or species have particular properties does not imply that their members do, and so the appeal to Darwinism as grounds for laissez-faire economics is not logically sound. Glee clubs, you see, cannot fit in a Volkswagen -- but their individual members can. In the same class, we might have discussed the power of Lincoln's arguments for the Union, on their merits and also to remind the students that there are good and compelling instances of argumentation -- good, solid reasoning.

These activities of reasoning should also be brought into play in brief and frequent writing assignments, because writing often demands a rigor which the spoken word does not necessitate. The little papers must be carefully examined by teachers and responded to with carefully reasoned comments which show students that arguments do not ordinarily have two sides; sometimes they have only one, sometimes a number of different views can be plausible. Notice, for example, that if arguments had only two sides, we might take as the two the conclusion that all the people in this room are men and that none of the people in this room are men. Neither position gets us the truth. Teachers should also take contemporary events as grist for the mill of reasoning, and they should insist that students must attend to and learn the relevant facts before reaching judgment. In this way, students can be helped to understand and achieve intellectual humility.

With these particular suggestions about intellectual propagation in mind, let me turn to the richer and overall idea of intellectual and moral propagation.

C. S. Lewis captures this idea with accuracy and eloquence in his book, The Abolition of Man, where he says:

> "When a Roman father told his son that it was a sweet and seemly thing to die for his country, he believed what he said. He was communicating to the son an emotion which he himself shared and which he believed to be in accord with the value which his judgment discerned in noble death. He was giving the boy the best he had, giving of his spirit to humanize him as he had given of his body to beget him." (pp. 31,32)

The Roman father, as Lewis sees, was communicating to his son the truth, as best he was able to grasp it, that courage and fidelity are more worthy of us than selfishness and cowardice. He offered his reasoned convictions about what a worthwhile life amounts to, not for any ulterior purpose, but because of a conception of the obligation of each generation of human beings to teach those which follow it what we have learned about how to live well. Lewis contrasts this idea of teaching with that of teachers who manipulate the young, in order to engender their service to some ideology or other, when no effort is made to develop their critical faculties or their ability

to reflect about what is worthy of us, what deserves our loyalty. He sees, as we all can, much of the latter form of teaching in the world now, and he distinguishes it from the case of the Roman father in this way:

> "...the difference between the old and the new education (is) an important one. Where the old initiated, the new merely 'conditions'. The old dealt with its pupils as birds deal with young birds when they teach them to fly: the new deals with them more as the poultry-keeper deals with young birds - making them thus or thus for purposes of which the birds know nothing. In a word, the old was a kind of propagation - men transmitting manhood to men: the new is merely propaganda." (pp.32,33)

Manhood or, if we prefer, mature adulthood, is an achievement. Adults can promote aspiration to it in the young by avoiding the pitfalls of simplistic dogmatism and by taking students seriously in work and at play. The dogmatism which most obviously promotes empty headedness is the absolutism which teaches that nothing needs to be thought about because everything is already known. This is the absolutism of the totalitarian, for the totalitarian, the tyrant, they demogogue, is a coward -- afraid to entrust the future to coming generations and to their capacity for insight and understanding. It is this cowardly lack of faith in our own kind and in their potential to take responsibility for the world in their turn which lies at the root of propaganda and of the forms of government which have no use for freedom. Such absolutism is incompatible with the transmission of manood to men, for, at base, it has no respect for men. It disdains to give real instruction in how to learn to think for oneself or even how to learn for oneself.

At the same time, the dogmatism which most obviously promotes hollow chests is that of absolute relativism, the idea that everything is merely subjection, that nothing is genuinely right or wrong, that all matters of value are just matters of personal taste, and that matters of taste are not to be disputed. For this dogma, genocide is like brussels sprouts -- some people like it and some don't, and nothing more can be said. As totalitarianism is cowardly, relativism is naive. As a dogma it is a plaything of the innocent; nobody who was ever at the mercy of barbarians, no hostage, no prisoner of war, ever concluded that it does not matter how people

are treated by others. No person who ever took life seriously as parent, husband, citizen, teacher, friend -- could endorse this dogma.

These dogmas bear attention because they make propagation impossible. The first cannot seek to transmit manhood to men because it is afraid to. The second cannot transmit anything to anyone, because it has nothing to transmit. And the irony of the dogma of relativism is that it is encouraged because it is supposed to promote understanding of and tolerance for people and ideas different from one's own. Yet, if relativism were true, then nothing would be truly right or wrong, good or evil, and accordingly, tolerance would not be either. If relativism were right, nothing would have any value, including tolerance, and a hollow chest would be the only kind to have.

In education, helping the young to achieve worthy, even noble, aspirations means steering a course safely between these dogmas. This is how propagation is made possible. And it consists in practice of lessons throughout the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities which teach the nature of sound judgment and of principled conduct. These, along with the examples set by parents, teachers, peers, public figures, and others, are the mainstays of education which promotes self-discipline, understanding of the academic disciplines of inquiry and discovery, recognition that personal identity is not a gift but an accomplishment, and appreciation that the ways we live and the ways we act have consequences. These are the lessons which give instruction in the responsible conduct of a life.

Let me be more specific. No student should ever be exposed in a school to anything trivial. It is partly because much of what is included in contemporary curricula is trivial that many students disdain formal education. In any case, the rest of the world will give the young all the trivia they ndeed, and our time as teachers with students is too important for that. Ours is the task of turning intelligence into civilized intelligence. And the question is how we are to do this -- beyond doing it by the example we set. What, in other words, is not trivial?

Above all, lessons which enable students to see what empty headedness, hollow chestedness, and their opposites are in practice. The examples available within the disciplines we teach are innumerable and spectacular. Let us look at a few by way of illustration.

The story of the Faithful Ruslan by Georgii Vladimov is a wonderful account of courage and loyalty subverted by propaganda. Faithful Ruslan is a guard dog in a Siberian concentration camp who relentlessly does what he has been trained to do, a courageous and loyal dog who has been used to serve the ends of ignoble masters who have no respect for human beings,no respect for civic identity, civil rights, humane conduct, due process, freedom, or the truth. Ruslan is a perfect example of the danger of having a full chest, a capacity for passionate conviction, when one has no critical intelligence by which to determine what deserves loyalty and courageous support. The dog shows the importance of learning to think well and the terrible danger of failing to do so. Ruslan shows that being smart is no adequate deterrent to being ignorant, and he shows how thoroughly people are at the mercy of demagogues and tyrants when they allow their own ignorance about how to gather and assess relevant evidence to persist. He has a full chest, but even though he is smart, he has an empty head, a head incapable of critical judgment.

William Roper, the son-in-law of Thomas More, is like Ruslan in this sense. But his empty-headedness is caused by impulsiveness, self-righteousness, and impetuosity rather than by propaganda. In A Man for All Seasons, Roper exhibits passionate conviction, and Thomas must repeatedly correct the dreadful errors in his judgment. Consider the following exchange in which Roper seeks to persuade More to arrest Richard Rich, a bad man who ultimately perjures himself for the sake of personal gain, but who has, at this point, broken no law:

ROPER Arrest him!
ALICE Yes!
MORE For what?
ALICE He's dangerous!
ROPER For libel, he's a spy.
ALICE He is! Arrest him!
MARGARET Father, that man's bad.
MORE There is no law against that.
ROPER There is! God's law!
MORE Then God can arrest him.
ROPER Sophistication upon sophistication!
MORE No, sheer simplicity. The law, Roper, the law, I know what's legal not what's right. And I'll stick to what's legal.
ROPER Then you set man's law above God's!
MORE No, far below; but let me draw your attention to a fact - I'm not God. The currents and eddies of right and wrong, which you find such plain sailing, I can't navigate. I'm no voyager. But in the thickets of the law, oh, there I'm a forester. I doubt if there's a man alive who could follow me there,thank God. (He says this last to himself)
ALICE (exasperated, pointing after Rich) While you talk he's gone!
MORE And go he should, if he was the Devil himself, until he broke the law!
ROPER So now you give the Devil benefit of law!
MORE Yes. What would you do? Cut a great road through the law to get after the Devil?
ROPER I'd cut down every law in England to do that!
MORE (roused and excited_ Oh? (Advances on Roper) and when the law was down, and the Devil turned round on you - where would you hide, Roper, the laws all being flat? (He leaves him) This country's planted thick from laws from coast to coast - man's laws, not God's, and if you cut them down - and you're just the man to do it - d'you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then? (quietly) Yes, I'd give the Devil the benefit of the law, for my own safety's sake.

Thomas More, by contrast to Roper, is a study in critical, civilized, intelligence and courage, intellectual humility, and moral decisiveness. He is a whole man through and through, as scholar, author, parent, husband, law-abiding politician, friend, and Christian. He has integrity in this sense that he is not one man in the bosom of his family and another in the exercise of his political responsibilities. He knows the limits of his authority and the extent of his responsibilities and acts accordingly.

The man Roper wants imprisoned, Richard Rich, is a perfect case of a person whose head is empty and whose chest is hollow. He cannot believe in anything except for his own gain, and because of this, he is prevented from self-knowledge, becomes craven and is forever susceptible to manipulation by others. He is one of what Reinhold Neibuhr

calls, "The Children of Darkness," those for whom nothing transcends self-interest. onsider this exchange between Rich and More, where More understands Rich much better than Rich does. Rich is pleading with Thomas for a political appointment and Thomas sees that Rich is ambitious without caring for anything beyond self-interest. That is, Thomas sees that Rich's ambitions are sterile - his political ambitions have nothing to do with the well-being of the coun try.

RICH Pardon me, Sir Thoms, but how much do you know about me?
MORE Whatever you've let me know.
RICH I've let you know everything!
MORE Richard, you should go back to Cambridge, you're deteriorating.
RICH Well, I'm not used!...D'you know how much I have to show for seven months' work -
MORE Work?
RICH Work! Waiting's work when you wait as I wait, hard!... For seven months, that's two hundred days, I have to show: the acquaintance of the Cardinal's outer doorman, the indifference of the Cardinal's inner doorman, and the Cardinal's chamberlain's hand on my chest!...Oh - also one half of a Good Morning delivered at fifty paces by the Duke of Norfolk. Doubtless he mistook me for someone.
MORE He was very affable at dinner.
RICH Oh, everyone's affable here..(MORE is pleased) Also, of course, the the friendship of Sir Thomas More. Or should I say acquaintance?
MORE Say friendship.
RICH Well, there! "A friend of Sir Thomas and still no office? There must be something wrong with him."
MORE I thought we said friendship...(he considers, then) The Dean of St. Paul's offers you a post; with a house, a servant and fifty pounds a year.
RICH What? What post?
MORE At the new school.
RICH (bitterly disappointed) A teacher!
MORE A man should go where he won't be tempted.

Rich does not learn to go where he won't be tempted, to take a position whose temptations he can resist and, as a result, he ends up by taking bribe after bribe until he perjures himself in order to be appointed Attorney-General for Wales. In taking the oath to testify truthfully, Rich offers himself as credit for the truth of his testimony; when he perjures himself, he forsakes the self he has offered as credit, destroys its value. He becomes literally incredible, in the much more important sense than the one our students see in the television show which has played fast and loose with the meaning of the word.

The history of the liberal and fine arts and the sciences is wealthy in such cases, appropriate at virtually all levels of education, at home and in schools and colleges. The materials can be ancient or modern - from the Socrates of the Apology to the Will Cain of High Noon to Admiral James Stockdale who served with such honor as a military officer and prisoner of war and who now writes on such issues as the Garwood case with eloquence and insight seldom equalled in modern journalism. The characters can be as empty-headed and cowardly as Emma's husband, Dr. Charles Bovary, or as lucid and courageous as James Madison, who was immensely ambitious to serve the country, as striking in athletics as Bobby Jones, or as pathetic as the Jake LaMotta portrayed in Raging Bull. The examples and cases are there for the asking, they are available for every discipline in the curriculum, they are the occasion to teach students, for example, how a person learns to think through an issue as Madison did in arguing for a constitutional republic in the Federalist and at the Constitutional Convention in 1787. They are opportunities for students to want to come to know, to aspire to know.

The lesson here for us is straightforward, and it was taught by the Danish philosopher and theologian, Soren Kierkegaard. He explained that the reasons Abraham, the father of Isaac, merits our attention is that he, like the prophet, Nathan, or the king, David, is one of us. What happened to Abraham, Kierkegaard pointed out, could happen to a Dane walking the moors of Denmark in the 19th century. Being human is not new -- it is only new to beginners, and for an individual to learn fully who he or she is, he must learn who we are, what human beings are, and what we have managed to make of ourselves. The examplars of intellectual and moral virtue and vice must be treated as real human beings.

To conclude, and by way of showing you the sort of thing I do as a teacher, I would like to read you a letter which I recently wrote to our daughters, ages 9 and 11. In it, I have tried to use concepts and distinctions in such a way as to promote clear thought, and stories in such a way as to enable chests to become full. I have tried to emulate the Roman father C. S. Lewis wrote about.

ST JOHN'S COLLEGE
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21404
FOUNDED 1696 AS KING WILLIAM'S SCHOOL

December 17, 1980

Misses Lee and Donna Delattre
212 Norwood Road
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Lee and Donna,

Mommy tells me that in school you have been talking in some of your classes about who your heroes and heroines are and that your classmates are talking about this too. In my life, I have studied and thought hard about heroes and heroines and I wanted to write you this letter to tell you something of what I have come to understand. Perhaps you will want to look at it from time to time as a reminder. When I come home we can talk about it if you would like.

First, many of your fellow students and possibly some of your teachers and certainly many other people you will meet in your lives do not have much of an ideaa what a hero is, what sorts of things a person must do to be truly heroic. You will find many people who confuse being heroic with being famous and so, right away, they will say the name of the first famous person or thing that comes into their minds, like Miss Piggy or R2-D2 or Farrah Fawcett. Now, of course, you don't have to be famous to be a hero and being famous doesn't make anyone heroic. Some people who are famous are called celebrities; they are people who are famous not for doing anything important but just for being famous. Sometimes they get famous because they are good looking or because they just happened to be somewhere near the center of television or newspaper attention or because someone wanted to sell a produce and put them in a comm erical, and so on. There is nothing about people who are famous for being famous which makes them of much interest. It is for this reason that good books and articles and thoughtful conversations about them almost never happen; instead they get written about in silly magazines and gossip columns which only desperately bored people ever read, hoping to see something exciting or find out something supposedly secreta and bad about the celebrity. The poor readers like bad secrets because they envy the celebrities and want everyone to pay attention to them instead.

But heroes are something else again from celebrities. Heroes are people who do things that are brave. There are lots of ways of being brave, but in general these ways can be given one or more of three descriptions:

A person can be physically brave
A person can be morally brave
A person can be intellectually brave
(And, of course, a person can be all of these, and when one is, then we are talking about the greatest of heroes and heroines).

Now I am going to make up some stories about being physically, morally, and intellectually brave which will help you to get the ideas (which in part, you already have). Ready?

TELEPHONE 301 • 263 • 2371

Once upon a time, there was a fifteen year old boy who went to school in New York City. He was a big boy for his age -- about 6 feet tall and 175 pounds. One day in early winter when it was very cold and the water in the rivers in the city was icy cold but not frozen, he and a school friend were talking across a bridge on their way home from school. As they walked and talked, they saw a young woman in the water swimming away from shore. They called to her, concerned about what she was doing and not fully understanding. Maybe, they thought, she was a member of the Polar Bears - a club made up of people who swim in cold water. Or maybe she was trying to drown herself. They quickly decided that she was trying to drown herself and so one of the boys ran to call the police to bring help while the other, our fifteen year old, took off all his clothes but his underwear and plunged into the water to try to rescue the woman. She tried to get away from him and fought against him, but he managed to swim with her back to shore - and so he saved her life. In all, he swam more that 700 yards - seven football fields - to save her. Of course, he risked his own life in the rescue, for his muscles might have tightened in the cold making him unable to swim. The police rushed the three people (for the other boy jumped into the water to help bring the woman ashore) to the hospital in ambulances to get them war and see whether they needed further medical care. Now these goys were physically brave, especially the one who risked his life; indeed, his act was heroic.

But there is more to the story than this. They boy was worried as he was swimming that he might be doing the wrong thing -- perhaps the woman's life was so unhappy that he should leave her alone. If she was unhappy enough to try to kill herself, what business, he thought, was it of his? Despite these thoughts, the boy said to himself that he should and would try to save her. Her life mattered, after all, and possibly she would one day be glad. This took moral courage on the boy's part, to act knowing that the consequences of his actions might not be happy ones, and still insiting that one should save a life if one can. And even though the woman might have hated him forever because she really wanted to die, in fact when he visited her the next day in the hospital, the woman said that she was glad he had saved her life and that she was alive.

And now, even though our fifteen year old boy has demonstrated two kinds of courage or bravery, there is even more to the story. As you would expect, the newspapers in the city learned about the rescue and printed stories about it. But one of the papers wanted to do more; it wanted to interview the boy and do a big story. It is a newspaper read by many, many people, for it contains lots of stories about things that are sensational -- fires, earthquakes, murders, crimes, scandals, astrololgers, and so on. When some of the boy's friends heard that he had been asked for an interview, they urged him to do it, because he would be famous. But the boy thought about which kind of paper it was, and he thought about how the paper might write something that would hurt the feelings of the woman he had saved, and so he told his friends that he did not think he should grant the interview. Despite their urging, he concluded that his ideas were better than theirs and refused to be persuaded; he did not give the interview. This took intellectual courage, to insist that he was right (just like it takes intellectual courage to admit we are wrong when we think we are). Thus, our fifteen year old boy showed us physical, moral, and intellectual bravery; he behaved like a hero.

Still, heroism is more than this. It doesn't mean just doing particular actions which are brave. It means being the kind of person who does not run away when physical, moral, or intellectual bravery are called for. So, for example, you might have a women whose husband dies and leaves her to raise several young children by herself. The person who does not run away, who does her best to be a good parent in these difficult circumstances, exhibits deep and continuing bravery and so is especially heroic, even though there may be no single events like rescuing a drowning person to catch our attention. It is a quiet, durable heroism that consists of facing up to whatever the world puts before us and refusing to give up. This is the heroism that deserves respect above all, and the place to look for it is in people you know and love, people you respect, people you see in your daily lives. You won't find very much of it in celebrities, although you will find it in some people who are famous.

The question to be asked now is how one becomes heroic. What things should we do to become the kinds of durable people who do not give up? And the answer is not, of course, that we should rush out to find people who are drowning so that we can save them. It is instead to practice not giving up, practice it in all the things we do.

With love from your Daddy.

Teaching ethics and critical thinking throughout the curriculum consists in these sorts of things, these sorts of initiations. I hope that my discussion of them is useful to you and that you will raise such questions as you have.

Thank you.